

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 USIE-00 PC-10 AID-20 M-02

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 A-01 SCA-01 SY-04

PPT-02 OPR-02 COME-00 TRSE-00 AGR-20 NASA-04 LAB-06

DOT-00 INT-08 PER-05 ORM-03 SR-02 FDRE-00 IO-14 EA-11

DRC-01 /219 W

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R 110830Z JUL 74

FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8345

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 2325

DEPT PASS USIA & PC

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT NG

SUBJECT: GON POLICY ON INTERNAL TRAVEL

SUMMARY: GON CONTINUES BAN ON DIPLOMATIC TRAVEL WITHIN NIGER AND HAS ADOPTED RESTRICTIVE ATTITUDE ON SIMILAR TRAVEL BY OTHER FOREIGNERS. AS RESULT, IN RECENT WEEKS, GON HAS VETOED PEACE CORPS FILM TEAM, NBC TEAM, AND EMBASSY TRIP AND HAS MODIFIED TRIP BY INSPECTOR GENERAL TODD. ON OTHER HAND, RESIDENT PC AND AID STAFF FREE TO TRAVEL. WE UNDERSTAND PRESIDENT HAS THIS RESTRICTIVE POLICY UNDER REVIEW. END SUMMARY.

1. AT TIME OF APRIL COUP, MILITARY LEADERS IMPOSED USUAL RESTRICTIONS ASSOCIATION WITH SUCH EVENTS, INCLUDING MARTIAL LAW, CURFEW, BAN ON INTERNAL TRAVEL, ETC. AS THINGS
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COOLED DOWN AND NEW GOVERNMENT ACQUIRED GREATER CONFIDENCE

IN ITS ABILITY TO CONTROL EVENTS, ALL RESTRICTIONS WERE LIFTED EXCEPT FOR CONTINUED BAN ON TRAVEL WITHIN NIGER. GON HAS REMINDED US FROM TIME TO TIME THAT THIS BAN REMAINS IN FORCE. WHILE BAN IS TECHNICALLY RELATED TO DIPLOMATIC TRAVEL, IT HAS IN EFFECT BEEN APPLIED TO IN-COUNTRY TRAVEL BY OTHER CATEGORIES OF FOREIGNERS.

2. RECENT EXAMPLES OF DIFFICULTIES WHICH WE HAVE ENCOUNTERED INCLUDE: (A) DISAPPROVAL OF REQUEST BY PEACE CORPS TO HAVE A FILM CREW VISIT NIGER TO FILM DROUGHT RELATED ACTIVITIES OF PCVS (NIAMEY 2138); (B) DISAPPROVAL OF REQUEST BY NBC TELEVISION TEAM TO VISIT REFUGEE CAMPS AND FILM US EFFORTS AGAINST DROUGHT. NBC TEAM LED BY LIZ TROTTA (LONDON 6895) COOLED ITS HEELS IN NIAMEY FROM JUNE 25 TO JUNE 29 WHILE IT AND WE WRESTLED WITH GON BUREAUCRACY FOR PERMISSION TO TRAVEL TO TAHOUA AREA. WE BOTH GOT RUN AROUND AND TO PREVENT NBC TEAM FROM LEAVING EMPTY HANDED, I ALLOWED IT TO FILM SEVERAL SEQUENCES IN FIELD NEAR RESIDENCE OVERLOOKING NIGER RIVER. TEAM LEFT JUSTIFIABLY ANNOYED AT GON PERFORMANCE BUT HOPEFULLY SATISFIED THAT WE DID THE BEST WE COULD FOR THEM; (C) DISAPPROVAL OF MY PROPOSED TRIP TO INTERIOR ON ATTACHE AIRCRAFT FROM DAKAR (NIAMEY 1905); (D) FOOT DRAGGING ON PCOPOSED TRAVEL BY INSPECTOR GENERAL TODD TO AGADEZ AND N'GUIGMI JULY 1 EN ROUTE TO N'DJAMENA UNTIL TOO LATE IN DAY TO MAKE THESE STOPS. HAGGLING INCLUDED REQUEST BY GON FOR DETAILED EXPLANATION AND JUSTIFICATION FOR AGADEZ STOPOVER WHICH WE FINESSED BECAUSE BY TIME REQUEST RECEIVED IT WAS TOO LATE IN DAY TO GO TO AGADEZ. WE FINALLY SETTLED FOR BRIEF STOPOVER IN N'GUIGMI JULY 2 ON WAY TO N'DJAMENA. GON HAD BEEN ON NOTICE OF TODD'S RETURN VISIT AT LEAST TEN DAYS AND HAD HAD DETAILS OF PROPOSED ITINERARY IN NIGER FOR FIVE DAYS.

3. TO BALANCE OFF THESE HORRORS THERE ARE A FEW PLUSES. VERY SOON AFTER COUP, GON INFORMED PEACE CORPS HERE THAT TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS DID NOT APPLY TO IT AND ITS STAFF MEMBERS AND PCVS WERE FREE TO TRAVEL AROUND COUNTRY AS REQUIRED. FURTHER, AID PERSONNEL HAVE FREELY TRAVELLED AROUND COUNTRY BY CAR AND BY AIR. OUR PRACTICE IS TO NOTIFY

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GOVERNMENT OF SUCH TRAVEL AND INVITE GON REPRESENTATIVE ALONG. GON HAS OCCASIONALLY DISPATCHED SOMEONE BUT RESPONSES SEEM TO DEPEND ON NATURE OF TRIP AND AVAILABLE PERSONNEL. IN SHORT, AS ALREADY REPORTED (NIAMEY 1906), GON HAS INTERPOSED NO LIMITATIONS ON RESIDENT AID OR PC STAFFS GETTING THEIR JOB DONE, INCLUDING TRIP TO INTERIOR IN MAY TO FILM AID PROJECTS. ALSO RELEVANT TO NOTE THAT AS NEW GOVERNMENT LEADERS HAVE TRAVELLED AROUND

THEY HAVE INVITED FOREIGN REPS TO ACCOMPANY THEM AS APPROPRIATE. FOR EXAMPLE, CHINESE AMBASSADOR LEE WAS IN PRESIDENT'S PARTY WHEN LATTER VISITED CHINESE RICE PROJECT AND UNDP REP ROTIVAL HAS ACCOMPANIED KOUNTCHE ON SEVERAL TRIPS OF INSPECTION WHEN UN PROJECTS INVOLVED.

4. GON'S POLICY FOR IN-COUNTRY TRAVEL BY FOREIGNERS SEEMS INCONSISTENT, CAPRICIOUS AND DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT REPERCUSSIONS ABROAD. ALL DECISIONS ON THESE MATTERS ARE REFERRED TO MINISTER OF INTERIOR (WHO IS ALSO PRESIDENT), AND SINCE HE HAS TAKEN OVER PORTFOLIO FROM MAJOR SANI THERE HAS BEEN LESS FLEXIBILITY. IN EACH OF CASES CITED ABOVE, HE HAS MADE FINAL DECISION. DECISIONS SEEM TO BE COMBINATION OF (A) INEXPERIENCE AND FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND WHY FOREIGNERS HAVE LEGITIMATE INTEREST IN OBSERVING CONDITIONS INLAND AND GETTING FIRST-HAND IMPRESSION OF SITUATION, (B) SUSPICION AND MISTRUST OF FOREIGN JOURNALISTS AND LACK OF APPRECIATION THAT THEY CAN BE HELPFUL IN SPREADING WORD ABOUT NIGER AND ITS PROBLEMS, (C) OVERLY PERSONALIZED RULE OF PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE WHO DOES NOT HAVE TIME TO CONSIDER MATTER ADEQUATELY BUT WILL NOT DELEGATE SUCH DECISIONS, (D) GENERAL CONFUSION WITHIN GOVERNMENT WHICH IS STILL GETTING ORGANIZED, AND (E) DESIRE TO PROTECT LOCAL OFFICIALS WHO AT TIMES ARE SWAMPED WITH VIPS AND DO NOT HAVE TIME OR RESOURCES TO GREET THEM IN STYLE TO WHICH THEY FEEL VISITORS ARE ENTITLED. UNDERLYING ALL THIS IS KOUNTCHE'S PRIDE, NATIONALISM AND INEXPERIENCE IN DEALING WITH FOREIGNERS.

5. IN SPITE OF ALL THIS, CONTROL ARE NOT THAT TIGHT. DURING LAST WEEK AT LEAST TWO AMERICAN JOURNALISTS WHO AVOIDED BUREAUCRACY AND MADE OWN CONFIDENTIAL

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PRIVATE ARRANGEMENTS, FLEW TO REFUGEE CAMPS, GOT THEIR STORIES AND DEPARTED WITHOUT INCIDENT. THIS COULD OF COURSE BOOMERANG.

6. THERE ARE RUMORS THAT PRESIDENT WILL SHORTLY REVIEW TRAVEL POLICIES ON INTERNAL TRAVEL. WHILE THIS IS BEING SORTED OUT, I DO NOT THINK WE SHOULD MAKE BIG ISSUE OF THIS BUT OFFICIAL US TRAVELERS FOR TIME BEING SHOULD BE AWARE THAT NIGER WELCOME MAT DOES NOT ALWAYS EXTEND BEYOND NIAMEY. HECK

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